

# bmj.com news roundup

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## EC produces strategy to reduce harm from alcohol

The European Commission has presented a strategy that sets out ways to tackle alcohol misuse. It highlights the need to deal with underage drinking and drink driving, and it stresses the importance of good practice and cooperation in information campaigns.

The document, which was requested by EU governments from the commission five years ago, has been the target of fierce lobbying behind the scenes. Sections of the alcohol industry, notably German, Austrian, and Czech brewers, have tried to derail the initiative from the start (*BMJ* 2006;333:871-2, 28 Oct).

"What was really annoying was that they misrepresented our policy. What they claimed we were planning to do, such as ban advertising or set a minimum legal drinking age of 18 [years] across Europe, were never on our agenda," said one EU official, adding that neither Irish nor UK industries had participated in the campaign.

The commission has said it is not placing alcohol in the same category as tobacco. It also says that combating alcohol misuse is a national responsibility. The European Union can only offer ways of supporting the measures taken by member states, and there is no prospect of European legislation.

Rory Watson *Brussels*

## Eating vegetables may slow cognitive decline

Eating lots of vegetables is associated with a slowing of cognitive decline in older people. In contrast, a high intake of fruit does not slow cognitive decline.

This was the conclusion of a six year study of 3718 people aged 65 years or older by Martha Morris of the Rush Institute for Healthy Aging, Chicago, and colleagues (*Neurology* 2006;67:1370-6).

The participants were taking part in the Chicago Health and



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## Doctor protests at greetings card manufacturer making fun of woman with acromegaly

A birthday card making fun of "the world's ugliest woman" will no longer be distributed to card shops after a doctor complained that the woman on the card was disfigured because of illness.

The card, sold in shops throughout the United Kingdom and produced by Hallmark Cards, shows close up photographs of Mary Ann Bevan, who, in the 1920s, appeared in circuses as "the world's ugliest woman." But a Dutch doctor, who saw the card in a UK shop, complained that it was inappropriate to make fun of the woman, who was ugly because she had acromegaly, a disfiguring disorder.

The message on the card refers to Cilla Black's *Blind Date* television programme, in which contestants have to pick a partner for a date whom they cannot see, choosing solely on the basis of what the potential dates say. The card bears the words, "When the screen went back, he was to always regret the words... I'll go for number three, Cilla."

Hallmark agreed to stop distribution of the card but said it would not recall existing stock.

Jon Danzig *London*

See [www.pituitary.org](http://www.pituitary.org).

Aging Project (CHAP), a 1993-2002 cohort study of older people from a population that is 62% black and 38% white. Participants answered a food frequency questionnaire and received cognitive assessments at baseline and at three and six year follow-ups. Cognitive function was derived from four tests.

People in the fourth fifth in terms of vegetable intake ate a median of 2.8 servings a day. They had 40% less cognitive decline than the fifth of people who ate the fewest vegetables, a median of 0.9 servings a day. And people in the top fifth, who ate the most vegetables, a median of 4.1 servings of vegetables a day, had 38% less decline compared with the bottom fifth.

Robert Short *London*

## Only 7% of research funds go on health needs of poor countries

Global spending on health research is rising by about \$10bn (£5bn, €8bn) a year, but too little is spent on researching diseases that affect the poor and marginalised people in developing countries, a new report from the Global Forum for Health Research says.

The total spending for 2003, the most recent year for which statistics are available, was almost \$129bn.

Stephen Matlin, the forum's executive director, told the *BMJ* that no one knew how much of

the total went into researching diseases that most affect poor people.

"But we do know that it's not nearly enough," he added.

Almost 93% of the global spending on health research comes from government funds and the private, for-profit sector, primarily drug companies, and is mostly spent on research into treating non-communicable disease.

Only the 7% that comes from philanthropic, non-profit making organisations, such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, targets the needs of poor countries, particularly infectious disease and maternal and child health.

Tessa Richards *Cairo*

## UK mental health charities call for more talking treatments

A group of leading UK charities has accused the NHS of failing to provide adequate psychological treatments as outlined in guidelines from the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE). The treatments should have been implemented three months after publication, the report says, but there has been what the group calls two years of inaction by the government.

The report, *We Need to Talk*, has been produced by the five leading UK mental health charities: the Mental Health Foundation, Mind, Rethink, The Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health, and Young Minds, with input from other organisations. It calls for a large, sustained cash injection to improve psychological treatments. Shorter waiting times, more training of mental health professionals, and more research in the area are also needed, it says.

"The NHS would never be allowed to fail to provide a drug or operation that was mandated by NICE," said Paul Farmer, chief executive of Mind.

Claire Frauenfelder *BMJ*

The report, *We Need to Talk*, is available at [www.mentalhealth.org.uk](http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk).